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C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 000213

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF, AF/E, DRL; LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/28/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [DJ](#)

SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI SEEKING WILLING CANDIDATES TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT

Classified By: Pol/Econ Erinn C. Reed for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) The February 27th evening news in Djibouti launched an open appeal to Djiboutians to be candidates in the upcoming Presidential elections, currently scheduled for April 8th. The news announced, "It is now official, if there are male or female Djiboutian candidates who would like to partake in the Presidential elections, it is high time they did it. They only have to register as candidates before March 8th, midnight." This development follows press releases issued by the opposition party, Djiboutian Party for Development (PDD), "clarifying" their leader's supposed candidacy.

12. (C) Rumors surround Mohamed Daoud Chehem, who in the Fall of 2004 announced that he would run as his party's candidate in Djibouti's 2005 Presidential elections. A press release issued February 21, 2005 by the party's Secretary General denied any involvement by PDD members or leaders in the previous day's swearing in of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) and clarified that PDD had not yet held a congress to decide its position regarding the elections. According to word on the street, Chehem is no longer in Djibouti, and it is unclear whether he intends to return. One rumor indicated that Chehem went to Europe with his family and did not plan to come back to Djibouti. Other rumors indicated he was in Europe on activities related to his candidacy. PDD is apparently split between factions that support Chehem's candidacy and those that want him to rejoin the opposition coalition and boycott the election.

13. (U) Contrary to the PDD press release of February 21, the government-run newspaper, La Nation, ran a small article February 28 with the title of "PDD confirms its participation in the presidential elections of 2005." The article continued that Chehem clarified his position in a February 14th press release stating the PDD would participate in the upcoming elections "to show its good will towards international opinion." It also stated that Chehem would be campaigning among the Djiboutian diaspora in Europe, the United States, and Canada in order to curry electoral and financial support. Chehem's statement to the press said his travels through Europe would focus on explaining to the diaspora the reasons for his candidacy in the coming elections.

14. (C) Comment: With the public announcement, it appears the Government is desperately seeking a candidate to run for President against the incumbent, Ismail Omar Guelleh. It is post's opinion that this is to make the elections more palatable to the international community as open, free and fair. Post is unsure whether Chehem will actually run considering the rift his candidacy has caused within his own party. The fact that La Nation printed a positive article regarding Chehem's supposed candidacy could indicate that there is some truth to rumors that the Government is backing Chehem in order to ensure a multi-candidate race. End Comment. RAGSDALE